

Dog Visit Pilot Proposal EPA Region 8

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Pilot Proposal Synopsis

The pilot will involve scheduled monthly “Dog Days” where registered therapy dog teams will visit employees at EPA’s Wynkoop facility. No more than four registered teams at a time will visit the facility. Visits will occur in designated locations (i.e. a room in the conference center, distributed conference rooms, the Atrium) and staff will be invited to participate in these visits. Registered therapy dog teams will adhere to set guidelines (see below) to help ensure the success of this pilot.

Why: Dogs excel as therapeutic agents. Studies have shown a decrease in both blood pressure and stress levels during therapy dog visits. A visit from a therapy dog team can increase overall emotional well-being and stimulate the mind in dramatic ways. Registered therapy dogs offer various benefits to people in the workplace, including:

- Bringing joy and laughter
- Taking a person’s mind off of problems and worries
- Getting people to share their emotions and stories
- Giving a chance for people to communicate with others
- Lowering stress levels and blood pressure

Extensive Testing

- A pilot involving registered therapy dogs means that the dogs visiting EPA have undergone testing to make sure that they have good manners and react positively to being touched by strangers. Accredited therapy dog organizations include, but are not limited to, Pet Partners, Alliance for Therapy Dogs, and Therapy Dogs International.

Clean, Groomed & Healthy

- Registered therapy dogs are required to be cleaned and groomed before visits, up-to-date on rabies vaccines and other inoculations recommended by their personal veterinarians.

Covered by Insurance

- Participating therapy dog volunteer teams are covered by therapy organizations' insurance in the unlikely event someone is injured as a result of interacting with the therapy dog.

Region 8 Therapy Dog Visit Pilot Guidelines for Dog Handlers

- **Items required on visits:** Dog handlers must carry a current therapy dog organization membership card, and dogs must wear identification tag on the collar, harness, or leash. Handlers must have written proof of their dog's vaccinations readily available at each visit, either carried with them, or available upon request.
- **Behavior of dogs:** Dogs must remain under control at all times. Any inappropriate behaviors must be quickly corrected: barks should be quieted; and jumping/pawing dogs should be quickly moved away while apologizing and checking to see if the person is OK.
- **Ask before entering:** Always ask before bringing your dog up to a person for visiting. If you are entering a room, make sure everyone in the room wishes to have the dog visit. If one person does **not** want a visit, ask that person if it is OK to visit with others in the room. If not, do not enter the room.
- **Walking the dog in the facility:** Dogs may not precede handlers down halls, around corners, at doorways or at stairways. Stand back while waiting for an elevator door to open. When the door opens, wait to assure safe exit of passengers. If the elevator is occupied, the handler must ask permission to enter with the dog.
- **Dog Grooming Requirements:** Participating dogs must be clean and well groomed, have trimmed/filed nails, clean teeth, be free of internal and external parasites, and in good general health.
- **Equipment:** Leashes must be 4 feet in length or shorter and made of material strong enough for the size/strength of the dog. Collars, including slip, buckle, quick release, martingale, limited slip or any other smooth collars made of chain, nylon or leather are acceptable. Head halters and body

halters/harnesses made of fabric webbing or leather with metal or plastic buckles are acceptable. Equipment that is not allowed includes: retractable, elastic/bungee or chain leashes, pinch, prong, spiked or electronic collars.

- **Only handlers may handle their dogs:** Handlers must never leave their dogs alone with others.
- **Incident or Injury:** If an incident or injury to an employee occurs: 1) Immediately contact the facility's safety officer on duty; 2) If the incident is a suspected bite, end the visit immediately; 3) Document the incident on all required forms for the facility; 4) Contact therapy organization per required protocol to report the incident.

Pilot Implementation

The point of contact for implementation of this pilot will: 1) contact accredited therapy dog organizations and solicit volunteer dog-handler teams to visit Region 8's Wynkoop facility; 2) working with facility management to determine appropriate locations for dog visits; 3) advertise the pilot program to employees; 4) invite employees to scheduled dog visits; and 5) collect feedback on the pilot from employees and facility management. After 1 year, a synopsis of the pilot will be prepared for the Senior Leadership Team. The initial point of contact for this pilot will be Suzanne Bohan. Suzanne is a registered therapy dog handler.